



Member Profile | **Gay Lea Foods Co-operative Limited**

Gay Lea Foods Co-operative Limited was formed in 1958 when a group of Ontario farmers came together with a common vision to build a better future for themselves and their communities. Today, Gay Lea Foods is a leader in the Canadian dairy industry and the second largest dairy co-operative in Canada, with members on more than 1,300 farms and more than 4,000 members overall.

The co-operative is the first of its kind to include licenced dairy cow *and* dairy goat members, and process both kinds of milk into a range of products – from the consumer favourite Spreadables, to North America’s first Smooth™ Cottage Cheese, and the innovative Nothing But Cheese™ snack, made with 100% cheese.

Throughout its history, Gay Lea Foods has been motivated by innovation and growing the market for Canadian milk. Multiple acquisitions – including Hewitt’s Dairy, Stirling Creamery, Black River Cheese, Ivanhoe Cheese and Salerno Dairy – have expanded the co-operative’s product family and further enhanced its reputation for quality products consumers can trust.

Fresh off an historic year that saw record membership growth, record processing volumes, record sales and record profitability, Gay Lea Foods is poised for further growth in 2017 with ambitious plans to expand its foods and ingredients business, while continuing to invest in innovative, industry-leading products. Plans include a \$60M expansion in Teeswater, the construction of a \$3M Research & Development Centre of Excellence in Hamilton, and additional expansions in Hamilton and Toronto.

For the first time, the co-operative is also extending membership eligibility to dairy farmers in Manitoba, following entry into a joint venture with Vitalus Nutrition Inc. to process dairy ingredients and butter in Winnipeg.

“As a dairy farmer owned co-operative, Gay Lea Foods is a firm believer in industry-led solutions to grow the market for Canadian cow and goat milk,” says President & CEO Michael Barrett. “We also believe in achieving success by staying true to our co-operative values and our vision of quality, innovation, partnerships, continuous improvement, and commitment to our members, employees.”

Indeed, even as Gay Lea Foods works to create sustainable opportunities in the Canadian dairy industry, they have remained first and foremost, a co-operative committed to its co-operative values.

Nowhere was this more evident than when Gay Lea Foods announced in November that its \$140 million expansion plan would include a \$60M investment in the rural community of Teeswater. The decision was clearly about more than the bottom line: Gay Lea Foods knew that investing in the aging facility meant investing in the future of Teeswater. It meant strengthening the fabric of rural Ontario, where their members and employees live, and prosper, with their families. It meant contributing to the rural sustainability of Ontario.

The co-operative's principles are also on display through its on-going support of education, poverty relief, co-operative development and community well-being projects around the globe. Members and employees have collectively raised more than \$1M to-date in support of communities around the world – most recently through the Gay Lea Foundation.

Over 59 years, Gay Lea Foods has clearly learned the best of working together. From the moment their milk is “born on the farm”, until their products reach the table – farmers, members and employees collaborate to fulfil member needs, support communities, and ensure their co-operative remains well positioned to lead toward a profitable, sustainable and innovative future.

Learn more at www.gaylea.com and www.dairyheritagemuseum.ca.